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NEW LIGHT ON THE ORIGINS OF THE WORLD WAR, II. BERLIN AND VIENNA, JULY 29 TO 31

UNTIL the recent publication of the *Kautsky Documents*¹ and the new *Austrian Red Book*² it has been believed by many that at a famous military council at Potsdam on the evening of Wednesday, July 29, the German militarists triumphed over the civilian diplomats and that the Kaiser at that time gave the fatal decision for war. The reason for this belief is natural. At the close of the council Bethmann returned to Berlin, sent for the British ambassador, and

proceeded to make the following strong bid for British neutrality. . . . Provided that neutrality of Great Britain were certain, every assurance would be given to the British government that the Imperial Government aimed at no territorial acquisition at the expense of France should they prove victorious in any war that might ensue. About the French colonies he was unable to give a similar undertaking. . . . It depended upon the action of France what operations Germany might be forced to enter upon in Belgium. But when the war was over, Belgian integrity would be respected if she had not sided against Germany.³

It has quite naturally been believed that the German Chancellor would never have taken this step, so extraordinary, so apparently self-incriminating, and as it turned out, so infelicitous, unless he knew that Germany had already taken the decision for war. But if one looks more closely at the actions of these men during those frightful sleepless days and nights, one comes to the conviction that the prevailing belief is not wholly correct. Bethmann still had the upper hand over the militarists during the following day. He had been able to persuade the Kaiser that no decision should be taken until an answer had been received from Vienna to a proposal which had been urged by England and Germany in the interests of the

¹ A few of these have been translated into English in *German Secret War Documents* (Amer. Assoc. for International Conciliation, no. 150, May, 1920).

² An English translation has been announced by Allen and Unwin, but has not been accessible to me. In addition to the works noted in my previous article, vol. XXV., pp. 616-639, may be noted: E. Müller-Meiningen, *Diplomatie und Weltkrieg* (Berlin, 1917, 2 vols.), very prejudiced but full of convenient documents; Freiherr von Liebig, *Die Politik von Bethmann-Hollweg* (third ed., Berlin, 1919, 2 parts), a typical Pan-German indictment of the whole "Bethmann-Hollweg system" before, during, and after the crisis of July, 1914; P. Hildebrandt, *Das Europäische Verhängnis* (Berlin, 1919), sane, with illuminating comment on the economic and political background; see also, below, note 44, on Russia.

³ *Dipl. Corresp.*, p. 64.

peace of Europe.⁴ And it was not until two days later, about noon of July 31, after the arrival in Berlin of official news of the Russian general mobilization,⁵ that is, mobilization against Germany as well as against Austria, that the Kaiser took the final decision to issue the fatal proclamation of "Imminence of War".⁶ During these three days, July 29 to 31, Germany was making a real, though belated, effort to induce Austria to accept a peaceful solution.

By Monday evening, July 27, the Kaiser and the militarist leaders had returned to Berlin.⁷ They were all vexed at the way in

⁴ "By the military authorities the wish had been expressed to proclaim *drohende Kriegsgefahr*; he had, however, hitherto represented successfully to His Majesty his own expressed view to the contrary and military measures had been limited to military protection of the railways". Bethmann's statement to the Prussian Cabinet July 30, *Kautsky Docs.*, no. 456. This is confirmed also by the report to Munich from Lerchenfeld, the Bavarian minister in Berlin, late on July 30 (*Kautsky Docs.*, vol. IV., p. 145): "Still no answer from Vienna. The Chancellor, however, has tonight declared to the Vienna Cabinet in the most emphatic manner that Germany cannot be towed in the wake of Austria's Balkan policy. In case Austria replies affirmatively, the Chancellor does not give up hope of maintaining peace. Peace, however, is not certain, for the mobilization which has already been begun by Russia, will make a backdown very hard for Russia. Germany's procedure is rendered very difficult, because one doesn't know whether the measures taken in Russia and France are a bluff or in earnest."

⁵ Cipher telegram of Pourtalès to Bethmann, July 31, despatched 10:20 A.M., arrived 11:40 A.M.: "General mobilization of army and navy ordered. First mobilization day, July 31." *Kautsky Docs.*, no. 473.

⁶ Bethmann to Tschirschky, July 31, 1:45 P.M.: "After the Russian general mobilization we have ordained *drohende Kriegsgefahr*, which will presumably be followed within 48 hours by mobilization. This unavoidably means war. We expect from Austria immediate, *active* participation in the war against Russia." *Kautsky Docs.*, no. 479; cf. nos. 477, 480, 488, 490-492, 499.

⁷ Rumbold was incorrect in his date in reporting to Grey on July 26: "Emperor returns suddenly tonight [Sunday] and Under-Secretary of State says that Foreign Office regret this step which was taken on His Majesty's own initiative. They fear that His Majesty's return may cause speculation and excitement." *Dipl. Corresp.*, p. 29. He did not return to Berlin until Monday afternoon; for he was still at sea on Sunday evening (*Kautsky Docs.*, no. 221, note 2), and at 11:20 A.M. on Monday Bethmann was telegraphing arrangements to meet him at the Wildpark railway station to give him the latest despatches (*ibid.*, no. 245, note). Moltke, before the crisis arose, had planned to return from Carlsbad to Berlin on July 25, but delayed a day (*ibid.*, nos. 74, 197), probably at Bethmann's request. Tirpitz, on July 24, had been requested by Bethmann not to return from Switzerland, in order to avoid arousing remark which might embarrass the "localization" policy; nevertheless he did return on his own responsibility three days later: "On July 27 when I arrived in Berlin . . . I, as well as the Kaiser who had returned against the Chancellor's wish on his own decision, and my ministerial colleagues who were now streaming together into Berlin, had a false view of the situation" [in thinking Germany might still, in spite of Russia's military preparations and the threatening mobilization of the English fleet, be able to steer clear of war]. Tirpitz, *Erinnerungen*, pp. 213 f., 236 f.

which Bethmann had kept them absent from Berlin and insufficiently informed. They had been told by him that to secure the successful "localization" of the Austro-Serbian dispute, calm was necessary; but they were doubtless of the same mind as the Kaiser, who, while at sea, pencilled ironically on one of Bethmann's injunctions to calmness in spite of rumors of Russian mobilization: "To remain calm is the citizen's first duty! just keep calm, always keep calm!! A calm mobilization is, to be sure, something new."⁸ They were all alarmed at the way Bethmann had allowed Berchtold to draw so heavily on the blank cheque of July 5. A serious crisis was developing for which no special military preparations had been made. It was not so certain that Bethmann's policy of "localization" would succeed after all. His optimism might prove to be a frightful blunder.⁹ Russia, drawing encouragement from France and England, was making much louder objections and more wide-reaching military preparations than had been anticipated. Sir Edward Grey, usually so calm and friendly, was reported to be "vexed for the first time" at Austria's over-speedy rejection of Serbia's conciliatory answer and at Germany's failure to influence her ally.¹⁰ The Kaiser, too, had been irritated at sea because it was through a newspaper agency, and not officially through Bethmann, that he had first learned the terms of Austria's demands on Serbia;¹¹ and also because Bethmann, hearing that the Kaiser had acted on a Wolff telegram and made plans for the rapid return of the navy, had "suggested most humbly that Your Majesty do not order a premature return of the fleet". Upon this the Kaiser made the characteristic annotation:

Unbelievable presumption! Unheard of! the idea never occurred to me!!! This was done because of the message of my Ambassador about the mobilization at Belgrade! This *may* cause mobilization of Russia; *will* cause mobilization of Austria! In this case I must keep my forces on land and sea *together*. In the Baltic there is not a single ship!! Moreover I generally take military measures not according to *one* Wolff

⁸ *Kautsky Docs.*, no. 197.

⁹ Helfferich and Tirpitz, writing their recollections with the advantage of hind-sight, claim that they quickly realized this; but Bethmann, more honest and frank, but with a less clear perception of what Bismarck used to call the "imponderabilia", has always unswervingly asserted that he steered the only available course under the circumstances.

¹⁰ *Kautsky Docs.*, no. 258.

¹¹ Kaiser to Foreign Office, July 26, *ibid.*, no. 231. This, together with what was said in my first article, seems to dispose effectively of Bunsen's "private information that the German ambassador [Tschirschky] knew the text of the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia before it was despatched and telegraphed it to the German emperor". *Dipl. Corresp.*, p. 74.

telegram but according to the general situation and this the *Civilian* Chancellor has not yet grasped!¹²

In spite of irritation at the Chancellor, there was still substantial solidarity of opinion on that Monday afternoon, July 27, in agreeing that he was correct in his idea that a peaceful solution could be found for the crisis, but that, to secure this, his policy of strict "localization" of the Austro-Serbian conflict must be abandoned. Germany must recognize that the matter had become one in which the other Powers were interested. She must give some heed to Grey's reiterated proposals for mediation and to Russia's attitude of protest. Consequently she must immediately attempt to take back into her own hands that control over her ally in the Serbian question which she had so foolishly abandoned on July 5. Instead of saying at Vienna, as she had done three weeks earlier, that the Kaiser "naturally cannot take any stand in the questions open between Austria and Serbia for they are beyond his competence",¹³ the Kaiser must at once begin to give advice to Austria and bring her back within the bounds of moderation. Hitherto Germany as well as Austria had been rendering nugatory the several peace proposals sincerely suggested by the Entente Powers.¹⁴ To continue to do this would

¹² *Kautsky Docs.*, no. 182. Cf. also nos. 125, 221, 231, and Tirpitz, *Erinnerungen*, p. 219. Tirpitz, if we are to believe his later recollections, made efforts to oust Bethmann from office and to replace his incompetent subordinate, Jagow, by some strong and able man like Hintze, who unfortunately, however, at the moment was sitting in Mexico. But though the Kaiser had been momentarily irritated with Bethmann, he declared "that he could not part with this man because he enjoys the confidence of Europe". *Ibid.*, p. 237; cf. also pp. 204-249, where the difference of moral and political outlook between Tirpitz and Bethmann is revealed on almost every page.

¹³ See above, vol. XXV., p. 627.

¹⁴ (a) Proposals by Russia and by England for extending the time-limit, purposely rendered by Austria impracticable both by the shortness of the time-limit and the lateness at which the Powers were notified; (b) a proposal for mediation between Austria and Serbia by the four less directly interested Powers, rejected outright by both Germany and Austria; and (c) a proposal for mediation between Austria and Russia, at first on July 25 "accepted in principle" by the German authorities; Lichnowsky urged it in three telegrams (*Kautsky Docs.*, nos. 157, 179, 180), and Jagow replied to Rumbold in Berlin that he was "quite ready to fall in with the suggestion" (*Dipl. Corresp.*, pp. 17-18, 23); through Lichnowsky, however, Jagow stated a little more reservedly that "the German Government accept in principle mediation between Austria and Russia by the Four Powers, reserving of course their right as an ally to help Austria if attacked" (*ibid.*, p. 40; cf. also pp. 55, 429, and *Kautsky Docs.*, no. 192). But when the Kaiser, while he was at sea, saw the proposal for mediation by the Powers, he jotted in the margin: "It's superfluous! For Austria has already explained her intentions to Russia and Grey cannot propose anything else. I'll not join in; only if Austria expressly requests me, which is not likely. In questions of honor and vital interests one does not consult others." The substance of this, wire-

be a mistake because it would simply increase the suspicion circulated by the French ambassadors¹⁵ that Germany was egging Austria on, knew the text of the ultimatum from the beginning, wanted war, and was acting *mala fide* in pretending to desire peace.

Accordingly on Monday night Bethmann telegraphed to Tschirschky at Vienna the full text of Lichnowsky's report of his latest conversation with Grey. Grey had pointed out the conciliatory character of Serbia's answer, hoped Austria would not begin hostilities, and said that he was urging moderation at Petrograd, and that Germany ought to do likewise at Vienna. After emphasizing the bad impression which a further refusal of all mediation would make, Bethmann added:

We cannot reject the rôle of mediator and must place the English proposal before the Vienna Cabinet for its consideration. Request Count Berchtold's opinion on the British proposal, as well as on Sazonov's wish to negotiate directly with Vienna.¹⁶

The basis on which the Kaiser was willing to act the mediatory rôle between Russia and Austria is what may be called the "pledge plan". Though he had been greatly impressed with the extremely conciliatory character of Serbia's reply, when it finally came to him on Tuesday morning,¹⁷ he nevertheless thought Austria ought to have some pledge as a guarantee that the Serbs would live up to their conciliatory promises. Tuesday night the mediatory proposal which he sketched was embodied by Bethmann in the following telegram to Vienna:

[Aside from a declaration to Russia that it intends no territorial acquisition in Serbia] the Austro-Hungarian Government, in spite of repeated questions as to its purposes, has left us in the dark. The answer now at hand of the Serbian Government to the Austrian ultimatum makes it evident that Serbia has in fact met the Austrian demands in so wide-reaching a manner that if the Austro-Hungarian Government adopted a wholly intransigent attitude, a gradual revulsion of public opinion against it in all Europe would have to be reckoned with. . . . [Russia will be satisfied] if the Vienna Cabinet repeats in Petrograd the definite

lessed to Berlin from the Kaiser's yacht by Count Wedel, caused the Foreign Office to back water at once. Jagow hastened to say that he "could not fall in with your suggestion" after all, because, as he added rather lamely and awkwardly, the proposed conference was "not practicable", and "would practically amount to a court of arbitration and could not in his opinion be called together except at the request of Austria and Russia". He advocated as a substitute the "direct conversations" between Vienna and Petrograd which Sazonov had just proposed.

¹⁵ Cf. *Dipl. Corresp.*, pp. 149, 164, 169, 272. *Kautsky Docs.*, nos. 215, 415, 485.

¹⁶ *Kautsky Docs.*, no. 277.

¹⁷ Cf. above, vol. XXV., p. 637, note 78. *Kautsky Docs.*, nos. 271, 293.

declaration that territorial acquisitions in Serbia lie far from its purpose, and that its military measures aim solely at a temporary occupation of Belgrade and other definite points of Serbian territory in order to compel the Serbian Government to a complete fulfillment of the demands and to serve as guarantees for future good behavior to which Austria-Hungary unquestionably has a claim after her experiences with Serbia. The occupation could be regarded like the German occupation in France after the Peace of Frankfort as security for the demand of the war indemnity. As soon as the Austrian demands were fulfilled, a withdrawal would follow. . . . You are immediately to express yourself in this sense to Count Berchtold emphatically and have him take the proper step in Petrograd. You are carefully to avoid giving the impression that we wish to hold Austria back. It is solely a question of finding a method which will make possible the accomplishment of Austria's purpose of cutting the vital nerve of Great Serbian propaganda without at the same time unchaining a world war, and in the end, if this is unavoidable, of improving as far as practicable the conditions under which it is to be waged. Wire reply.¹⁸

To this telegram Bethmann had received no reply by Wednesday evening at the time of the military council at Potsdam, even though twenty-four hours had elapsed, and telegrams even at this time of crowded wires ordinarily were transmitted between Vienna and Berlin within three or four hours. Therefore he sent on Wednesday evening three more telegrams to secure an immediate answer.¹⁹ In the meantime, however, while he could get no answer from Vienna on the "pledge plan", he began to receive reports from the other capitals which seemed to indicate bad faith or stupidity on the part of his ally. He telegraphed to Tschirschky:

These expressions of the Austrian diplomats must be regarded as indications of more recent wishes and aspirations. I regard the attitude of the Austrian Government and its unparalleled procedure toward the various governments with increasing astonishment. In Petrograd it declares its territorial disinterestedness; us it leaves wholly in the dark as to its programme; Rome it puts off with empty phrases about the question of compensation; in London Count Mensdorff hands out part of Serbia to Bulgaria and Albania and places himself in contradiction with Vienna's solemn declaration at Petrograd. From these contradictions I must conclude that the telegram disavowing Hoyos [who, on July 5 or 6 at Berlin, had spoken unofficially of Austria's partitioning Serbia] was intended for the gallery, and that the Austrian Government is harboring plans which it sees fit to conceal from us, in order to assure herself in all events of German support and to avoid the refusal which might result from a frank statement.²⁰

¹⁸ Bethmann to Tschirschky, July 28, 10:15 P.M., *Kautsky Docs.*, no. 323. Cf. *Red Book*, III., no. 24, and Gooss, pp. 243-244.

¹⁹ *Kautsky Docs.*, nos. 377, note, and 385; for Berchtold's eventual dilatory and evasive reply, see no. 388; also nos. 432 and 433.

²⁰ Bethmann to Tschirschky, July 29, 8 P.M., *ibid.*, no. 361.

On Wednesday afternoon, July 29, while still waiting in vain for a reply from Berchtold as to the "pledge plan", Bethmann took up two more peace proposals which had been suggested, and supported both energetically at Vienna. One was the suggestion from Sazonov for a negotiation by "direct conversations" between Vienna and Petrograd.²¹ Bethmann had already handed this suggestion on to Vienna without comment as soon as it had been received by him on July 27.²² But it had been at once flatly rejected by Berchtold, because Sazonov had intended that the direct conversations should take up modifications of the terms of Austria's ultimatum. Berchtold was determined not to enter into any negotiations which might touch the "local" issues existing purely between Austria and Serbia. As an additional reason for his refusal to "converse directly" on Austro-Serbian relations, he pointed out that the time for a peaceful settlement of those relations was passed, since the declaration of war and the opening of hostilities had already taken place. As a result "direct conversations" between Vienna and Petrograd had come to a halt on July 28, with the result that Sazonov was much incensed.²³ Sazonov had concluded, though mistakenly, that because Berchtold flatly refused to discuss Austro-Serbian relations, he was also unwilling to converse at all with Russia. To re-open "direct conversations", and to clear up what seemed to be an unfortunate misunderstanding between Vienna and Petrograd, Bethmann sent now three more telegrams to Vienna very late on Tuesday night.²⁴ After mentioning hopefully the interchange of telegrams which had begun between the Kaiser and the Tsar,²⁵ and minimizing the danger of the rumored Russian military preparations, Bethmann added severely:

²¹ *Ibid.*, nos. 238, 282.

²² *Ibid.*, notes to nos. 238, 292.

²³ For this abortive result of the proposals for "direct conversations", see *Red Book*, II., nos. 73, 95; III., nos. 16, 17, 19, 20; *Dipl. Corresp.*, pp. 40, 58, 85, 177, 197-199, 203, 205, 213, 505, 522-524. A comparison of the first edition of the *Red Book*, published in the *Dipl. Corresp.*, with the new edition shows that the former characteristically omits some of the most important sentences and paragraphs.

²⁴ *Kautsky Docs.*, nos. 383, 385, 396.

²⁵ I pass over these because they have long been familiar; it may be noted, however, that their wording in the *Dipl. Corresp.*, pp. 411-413, 431-432, 542, being a translation from English into German and from German back again into English, differs somewhat from the original English always used in the Willy-Nicky correspondence. Also the date of the Tsar's first telegram (p. 431, exhibit 21) should be July 29, 1 A.M., and not 1 P.M., and that of his third telegram (exhibit 23a) should be July 30, 1:20 A.M., and not 1:20 P.M.; that is, these two efforts of the Tsar took place twelve hours earlier than was represented, whether by intention or by a mere error, in the original German *White Book*.

The refusal of every exchange of views with Petrograd would be a serious mistake, for it provokes Russia precisely to armed interference, which Austria is primarily interested in avoiding. We are ready, to be sure, to fulfill our obligations as an ally, but must refuse to allow ourselves to be drawn by Vienna into a world conflagration frivolously and in disregard of our advice. Please say this to Count Berchtold at once with all emphasis and with great seriousness.²⁶

The other plan which Bethmann also cordially took up late Tuesday night was Grey's proposal for mediation between Austria and Russia, either by the four Powers, or by Germany alone, on the basis of Serbia's very conciliatory original answer and the news from Rome that she was now ready for the sake of peace "on condition of certain interpretations to swallow even articles 5 and 6, that is, the whole of the Austrian ultimatum".²⁷ This proposal of Grey's was eagerly welcomed by Bethmann as a possible happy solution. In sending it on to Vienna, he genuinely again "pressed the button", by adding: "Please show this to Berchtold immediately and add that we regard such a yielding on Serbia's part as a suitable basis for negotiation along with an occupation of a part of Serbian territory as a pledge."²⁸ But Berchtold was still deaf to the button; he eventually made the characteristic reply that, though the integral acceptance of Austria's note would have been satisfactory before hostilities had begun, "now after the state of war has begun, Austria's conditions must naturally take another tone".²⁹

Grey's proposal was all the more eagerly welcomed by Bethmann, partly because Grey quickly supplemented it by embodying the two very points which Germany herself had already been urging at Vienna and Petrograd in her "pledge plan", *viz.*, a new statement by Austria of her intentions in Serbia which would satisfy Russia, and a pledge in the shape of the temporary military occupation of Belgrade which would satisfy Austria; and partly because Grey gave his first "warning". As Lichnowsky reported his conversation with Grey:

to him [Grey] personally a suitable basis for such mediation seemed to be that Austria, after the occupation perhaps of Belgrade or other places, should announce her conditions. Should Your Excellency [Bethmann], however, undertake the mediation as I was able to propose to him early this morning as a possibility, this would, of course, suit him just as well. . . . [At the close of the conversation Grey] said he wanted to make

²⁶ *Kautsky Docs.*, no. 396.

²⁷ Lichnowsky to Bethmann, July 29, 2:08 P.M. *Ibid.*, no. 357; *Dipl. Corresp.*, pp. 53-54.

²⁸ *Kautsky Docs.*, no. 384.

²⁹ Tschirschky to Bethmann, July 30, 3:20 A.M. *Ibid.*, no. 432.

me a friendly and private statement. . . . It would be possible for her [England] to stand aside so long as the conflict is limited to Austria and Russia. But if we and France should be drawn in, then the situation would immediately be a different one, and the British government under the circumstances would be forced to rapid decisions. In this case it would be impossible to stand aside for long and to wait; "if war breaks out, it will be the greatest catastrophe that the world has ever seen". He was far from wishing to utter any kind of threat; he merely wanted to save me from being misled and himself from the reproach of insincerity and, therefore, chose the form of a private explanation.³⁰

Upon hearing of this alarming possibility that England might not remain neutral, so contrary to all that Lichnowsky, King George, and the general British situation had led him to expect, Bethmann immediately transmitted the whole conversation to Vienna and proceeded to "press the button" very vigorously:

If Austria refuses all negotiations, we are face to face with a conflagration in which England will be against us, Rumania and Italy according to all indications will not be for us, and we shall stand two against four Powers. Through England's opposition the main blow will fall on Germany. Austria's political prestige, the military honor of her army, as well as her just claims against Serbia, can be adequately satisfied by her occupation of Belgrade or other places. Through her humiliation of Serbia, she will make her position in the Balkans as well as in her relation to Russia strong again. Under these circumstances we must urgently and emphatically urge upon the consideration of the Vienna Cabinet the adoption of mediation in accordance with the above honorable conditions. The responsibility for the consequences which would otherwise follow would be for Austria and for us an uncommonly heavy one.³¹

To this urgent request by Germany for Austria's acceptance of a solution which perhaps even yet might have avoided the conflagration of Europe, Berchtold gave no definite or frank answer. Bethmann's telegram, inclosing Lichnowsky's conversation with Grey, after being deciphered was handed to Tschirschky Thursday, July 30, while he was at lunch with Berchtold. "Berchtold listened, pale and silent, while they were read through twice; Count Forgách took notes; finally Berchtold said he would at once lay the matter before the Emperor."³² After Berchtold had departed to put on another suit of clothes in which to present himself before His Majesty, Tschirschky spent a good part of the afternoon setting

³⁰ *Kautsky Docs.*, no. 368; cf. also Grey's report to Goschen of the same conversation, in *Dipl. Corresp.*, pp. 66-67.

³¹ Bethmann to Tschirschky, July 30, 2:55 A.M. *Kautsky Docs.*, no. 395. Cf. also Goschen to Grey, *Dipl. Corresp.*, p. 84; Gooss, pp. 233-246.

³² Tschirschky to Bethmann, dated July 30, but despatched July 31, 1:35 A.M. *Kautsky Docs.*, no. 465.

forth long and earnestly to Forgách and Hoyos all of Bethmann's arguments. It was useless. Instead he was cynically informed by these two intimate advisers of Berchtold that "in view of the feeling in the army and in the people any checking of the military operations in progress was out of the question . . . Conrad von Hoetzendorff [Austrian chief-of-staff] would lay before the Emperor this evening the order for general mobilization, as a reply to the measures which have already been taken". He was also finally told that Berchtold could not give any answer until the following morning, for the reason that Tisza, who would not be in Vienna until then, must be consulted.³³ Later in the evening Tschirschky learned that Austria had decided to order general mobilization, *i.e.*, against Russia as well as against Serbia,³⁴ and that Berchtold's answer to the "pledge plan" would "presumably not be absolutely negative".³⁵ What this dubious phrase meant is now clear from Berchtold's double-faced procedure as revealed, on the one hand, in his pretended attitude to the Russian ambassador, and, on the other, in his real attitude as reported in the minutes of the ministerial council of Friday morning. With the Russian ambassador he took up conversations again in a most friendly manner and to all the Powers pretended that Austria was ready to "consider favorably" Grey's proposal. To the British ambassador in Vienna, he gave the impression, as Bunsen later wrote to Grey, that

Austria, in fact, had finally yielded, and that she herself had at this point good hopes of a peaceful issue, is shown by the communication made to you on the 1st of August by Count Mensdorff [the Austrian ambassador in London] to the effect that Austria had neither "banged the door" on compromise, nor cut off the communications. . . . Unfortu-

³³ *Kautsky Docs.*, no. 465.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, nos. 468, 498. *Red Book*, III., no. 50. Austrian general mobilization was not caused by the announcement of Russian general mobilization as the Germans have often asserted, nor *vice versa*, because the announcements of mobilization took place virtually simultaneously before the news could go from the one country to the other. General mobilization was the last step in Austria's game of bluff to prevent Russia from interfering in the Serbian question. She took this step primarily because of Russia's unexpected stiff attitude and because of the rumors of the wide-reaching military preparations which Russia was making. But it is highly probable that she may have been hastened in taking the step, partly by the reports of Szögyény, her ambassador in Berlin, who was too much inclined to reflect the views of the German militarists rather than of the German Foreign Office; and partly by the arrival in Vienna at 10:20 P.M. of a telegram from the Austrian military attaché in Berlin, who reported that Moltke strongly urged Austrian general mobilization. *Red Book*, III., no. 34; *cf.* Gooss, p. 307.

³⁵ Telephone message from Tschirschky to Berlin. *Kautsky Docs.*, no. 468; *cf.* also nos. 432, 433.

nately these conversations were cut short by the transfer of the dispute to the more dangerous ground of a direct conflict between Germany and Russia. Germany intervened on the 31st July by means of her double ultimatum to St. Petersburg and Paris. The ultimatums were of a kind to which only one answer was possible, and Germany declared war on Russia on the 1st August and on France on the 3rd August. A few days' delay might in all probability have saved Europe from one of the greatest calamities in all history.³⁶

How far Berchtold, however, was from the slightest intention of really and honestly yielding to mediation and stopping the Austrian advance in Serbia is now unmistakably revealed in the protocol of the minutes of the ministerial council held on Friday morning, July 31.³⁷ After stating Grey's last proposal and Bethmann's strong urging that it be accepted, Berchtold pointed out that experience showed that mediatory powers always tried to reach a compromise by forcing one power to pare down the conditions it had made;

It was probable that they would attempt this now also, when in the present conjuncture France, England, and Italy also would represent the Russian standpoint, and we [Austria] should have a very doubtful support in the present German ambassador in London. From Prince Lichnowsky everything else was to be expected except that he would represent our interests warmly. If the action should end now merely with a gain of prestige, it would in his opinion have been undertaken wholly in vain. From a mere occupation of Belgrade we should gain absolutely nothing, even if Russia should give her consent to it. All this would be mere tinsel [*Flitterwerk*]. Russia would come forward as the savior of Serbia, and especially of the Serbian army. The latter would remain intact, and in two or three years we should again have to look forward to the attack on Serbia under much more unfavorable conditions.

He had therefore had an audience with Francis Joseph. His Majesty had at once declared that there could be no check placed upon military operations, but accepted the proposal "that we should carefully avoid accepting the English proposal in actual substance, but that in the form of our answer, we should pretend to be ready to meet it. . . ."³⁸

Berchtold's colleagues agreed with him or went even further. Tisza, who had now completely changed his attitude, made no opposition. To Stürgkh "the very thought of a mediatory conference was so odious that he preferred to avoid even the pretense of accepting one". Bilinski was equally hostile to a conference, because "the course of the London Conference was so horrible to

³⁶ Bunsen to Grey, Sept. 1, 1914. *Dipl. Corresp.*, pp. 117-118; cf. also pp. 99-100, 212-213, 222, 528.

³⁷ *Red Book*, III., no. 79; Gooss, pp. 234-243, 301-306.

³⁸ *Red Book*, III., no. 79; repeated in less bald language in no. 80. Cf. Gooss, p. 302.

recall to memory, that all public opinion would reject the repetition of such a spectacle".³⁹

Meanwhile at Berlin Berchtold's failure to heed any of Bethmann's efforts for peace and his delay in replying to Bethmann's telegrams greatly embarrassed the Chancellor's struggle to keep the upper hand over the militarists. In his arguments with them and with the Kaiser, his position was undermined by continually having to say "No word from Vienna". By July 29 he was already being pressed strongly by Moltke and by Berlin public sentiment to take a decision. Every additional hour of indecision lessened the advantage of Germany's speedy mobilization through which they hoped, if war should come, to win an overwhelming victory over France before they had to meet a large force on the eastern frontier.⁴⁰ Their mobilization plan contemplated going through Belgium, to which Bethmann personally was strongly opposed on moral grounds. But in the preceding months, though he must have known of the existence of this plan, he had not chosen to resign his office as a protest. Perhaps he had been so absorbed in his policy for a better understanding with England, that he had never looked squarely in the face the violation of international law which Moltke contemplated, if his own Bagdad Railway and African colonial agreements with England should fail. Now, when suddenly faced with the imminence of war with Russia, brought on by Austria's action and his own negligence, he was unable to meet Moltke's arguments of strategic military necessity. Aside from the moral objection, he might urge the practical one that it might bring in England against Germany. Moltke admitted that the addition of England to Germany's enemies would be a serious difficulty in the matter of provisioning Germany, particularly if the war should last long. But still he advised against buying England's neutrality at the price of sparing Belgium, even if this would have been possible, which he did not think was the case. An advance into France from Alsace-Lorraine would have cost the German army fully three months, and given Russia such a start that a victory on both fronts would not be possible. Therefore the only way to victory was to Paris *via* Belgium.⁴¹

Accordingly, on July 29, Bethmann was forced into the foolish

³⁹ *Red Book*, III., no. 79.

⁴⁰ *Kautsky Docs.*, nos. 349, 372; Bethmann, *Betrachtungen*, pp. 166-169.

⁴¹ Statement of Moltke's views as reported by the Bavarian minister in Berlin on Aug. 5, 1914. *Kautsky Docs.*, vol. IV., p. 157. Cf. also Moltke's confidential statements to Lieut.-Col. von Haeften about 1 A.M. on July 31, as reported by the latter in the *Nordd. Allg. Zeitung*, no. 261, Sept. 21, 1917.

act of making the bid for British neutrality which instantly roused suspicions abroad as to the German militarist intention. A courier was also despatched by Jagow to the German ambassador at Brussels, bearing a sealed document. It was not safe to trust this even to a ciphered telegram, nor was it desirable to reveal even to the ambassador himself the crime which after all it might not be necessary to put into practice. On opening it, the ambassador merely found instructions to keep safely another sealed envelope which he would find enclosed, but which he was to open only if subsequently instructed by telegram from Berlin. This inner envelope contained the detailed demands which Moltke had written with his own hand on July 26, for eventual presentation to Belgium, if war should come.⁴² It included the absolutely fictitious statement, for which there was never the slightest evidence either on July 29 or later, that "there lies before the Imperial Government reliable information in regard to the intended advance of French troops in the Meuse district Givet-Namur. They leave no doubt of France's purpose to attack Germany through Belgian territory." Givet-Namur was the line on which Moltke, months before,⁴³ had determined to advance if war should come. Moltke also made arrangements for post-dating the document and making it appear that this "reliable information" had only arrived as hostilities were beginning. Neither in his "scrap of paper" conversation nor in his book, did Bethmann stultify himself by adopting as his own this fictitious allegation of Moltke's. Nor in his book does he seek, as many Germans have so laboriously attempted to do, to establish any justification for the violation of Belgium from the "disclosures" revealed subsequently by the German investigation of the Belgian archives. These disclosures, of course, whether there is any incriminating evidence in them or not, being subsequent to the invasion of Belgium, are no more a justification for that act than Frederick the Great's later revelations from the Dresden archives justified his attack on Saxony at the opening of the Seven Years' War.

Still more embarrassing to Bethmann in his effort to restrain the militarists was the news from Russia. For some days the reports

⁴² *Kautsky Docs.*, nos. 375, 376, 648, 735.

⁴³ At any rate as early as March 31, 1914, *cf. Kautsky Docs.*, vol. I., p. xv. The plan to go through Belgium to annihilate the French army by an attack on its flank and rear, which it had been calculated could be accomplished on the twenty-seventh day after the opening of hostilities, originated about the time of the Russo-Japanese War with Moltke's predecessor as chief of the General Staff, Count von Schlieffen; *cf. H. von Kuhl, Der Deutsche Generalstab in Vorbereitung und Durchführung des Weltkrieges* (Berlin, 1920), pp. 109, 142-179.

of the Russian "measures preparatory to war" had become very alarming. The statements of the Russian minister of foreign affairs did not harmonize with those of the Russian minister of war, and both were contradicted by the apparently unmistakable evidence of very wide-reaching military activities.⁴⁴

On the morning of Thursday, July 30, it was known in Berlin that Russia had officially admitted "partial mobilization", and it was suspected, probably with good reason, that she had done much more. Nevertheless, Bethmann appears still to have kept the upper hand during the day. At its close he gave the Prussian cabinet a long and still hopeful summary of the situation; he declared that he was still supported by the Kaiser in the determination that no decision for war should be taken, until an answer had been received from Austria as to her acceptance of the "pledge plan".⁴⁵

Though the Kaiser by this time was in a very excited state of mind, as indicated by a raving philippic against his Austrian ally as well as against the Entente enemies who had "encircled" Germany,⁴⁶ he was persuaded by Bethmann to make a personal appeal to Francis Joseph. This was followed by another telegram of Bethmann's own, warning Berchtold of the terrible consequences of a refusal to accept the "pledge plan" which was now being urged by

⁴⁴ The very difficult question of Russian mobilization has been most thoroughly discussed by R. Hoeniger, *Russlands Vorbereitung zum Weltkrieg* (Berlin, 1919); "Untersuchungen zum Suchomlinowprozess", in the *Deutsche Rundschau*, CLXXV. 15-80 (Apr., 1918); and "Fürst Tundutow über die russische Mobilmachung", *ibid.*, CLXXVI. 150-165 (Aug., 1918). Hoeniger has used and printed a large number of Russian mobilization orders, which the Germans afterwards captured in the Warsaw district. On the basis of these, he believes that Sukhomlinov and Januschkevitch, the Russian minister of war and chief of general staff, began on July 25 to take very wide-reaching "preparatory measures for war" which were almost equivalent to mobilization, that the idea of "partial mobilization" against Austria was really a fiction intended to deceive Germany and perhaps even the Tsar. Under cover of "partial mobilization", steps were really being taken against Germany as well as against Austria. It is also clear from the extraordinary revelations of the Sukhomlinov trial that these Russian militarists flatly disobeyed and deceived the Tsar who unquestionably worked and hoped for peace up till the very last moment. Whether Hoeniger is correct in his analysis of the nature of Russian preparatory measures for war, I cannot at present give an opinion. I think it doubtful, however, whether he is correct in thinking that Sazonov was working hand in hand with the militarists in a deliberate effort to deceive and surprise Germany. I think it more probable that they worked behind his back and that he honestly worked and hoped for peace, at least until July 29. Cf. Oman, *op. cit.*, ch. vii.

⁴⁵ *Kautsky Docs.*, no. 456; see above, note 4.

⁴⁶ Pencilled on a telegram from Pourtalès which reported that Sazonov regretted that the Russian mobilization measures could not be stopped. *Kautsky Docs.*, no. 401; translated in *German Secret War Documents*.

both England and Germany.⁴⁷ But the militarists were already getting the upper hand. Early in the evening Moltke had advised the Austrian chief-of-staff to order the general mobilization of the whole Austrian army.⁴⁸ Before 11:20 P.M. Bethmann had been told by the General Staff that Russia's military measures were so alarming that a speedy decision by Germany was necessary, unless Germany was to be taken by surprise. Bethmann for a moment abandoned hope.⁴⁹ A few minutes later, however, he learned that a telegram from King George V. to Prince Henry had arrived.⁵⁰ It was in answer to the appeal which Prince Henry had made at the Kaiser's prompting about noon.⁵¹ In it King George said:

My Government is doing its utmost, suggesting to Russia and to France to suspend further military operations, if Austria will consent to be satisfied with occupation of Belgrade and neighboring Serbian territory as a hostage for satisfactory settlement of her demands, other countries meanwhile suspending their war preparations. Trust William will use his great influence to induce Austria to accept this proposal, thus proving that Germany and England are working together to prevent what would be an international catastrophe.⁵²

Bethmann grasped at this telegram from George V. as another chance for peace. He sent it on with a last urgent appeal "for a definite decision in Vienna within the course of the day". But it had no more influence than its predecessors.⁵³ It remained, however, as a slender hope for a few hours until the arrival in Berlin of Pourtalès's despatch from Petrograd confirming beyond doubt the fact that Russia had ordered general mobilization. Thereupon, as the militarists had urged, Germany declared about noon the "Imminence of War", and a little later despatched her ultimatums to Russia and France.

On the whole these new documents from Berlin and Vienna place Austria in a much more unfavorable light than hitherto. They

⁴⁷ Kaiser to Francis Joseph, July 30, 7 P.M., *Kautsky Docs.*, no. 437: "The personal appeal of the Tsar to undertake mediation for the prevention of a world conflagration and for the preservation of world peace, I believed it impossible to reject, and have had proposals submitted to your Government through my ambassador yesterday and today. Among other things they point out that Austria should state her demands after the occupation of Belgrade and other places. I should be deeply indebted to you if you would notify me of your decision as soon as possible." Bethmann's telegram was sent at 9 P.M., *ibid.*, no. 441.

⁴⁸ See above, note 34.

⁴⁹ *Kautsky Docs.*, nos. 450 and 451, note.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 452.

⁵¹ Cf. *ibid.*, nos. 417, 474.

⁵² *Ibid.*, no. 452; *Dipl. Corresp.*, pp. 538-539.

⁵³ Bethmann to Tschirschky, July 31, 2:45 A.M. *Kautsky Docs.*, no. 464.

likewise clear the German government of the charge that it deliberately plotted or wanted the war. Whatever individual militarists or Pan-German writers may have wished or said, there is no doubt that the Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg, as the official representative of German foreign policy, aimed at peace and better relations with Germany's neighbors in the period just before the war. In fact the very charge that has been most bitterly brought against him by many of his own countrymen is that he was too much a man of conciliation and peace. Germany did not will the war. In a narrow sense, even, looking merely at the events of these three days one can easily see how the Germans have become convinced that the war was forced upon them. As the crisis grew more serious, particularly after the Austrian declaration of war on Serbia and the warning from England, Bethmann did make real and sincere efforts, though belated, to hold Austria back and find a feasible solution. But he did not find adequate support from his own War-Lord and in Vienna. Berchtold had chosen his course. Austria, as was believed with reason, was growing weaker and weaker through the disintegrating force of nationalism and the ambitious imperialism of Russia, which supported the aspirations of Austria's smaller neighbors. The Serajevo crime afforded a good excuse to attempt to rehabilitate her position by action against Serbia. He counted on his powerful ally for protection in case of Russian interference. He had believed it would again be possible to bluff Russia by "rattling the sabre" of Emperor William. But imperialism and militarism, encouraged by a jingo press, had put Russia in a very different temper from that which prevailed after the Russo-Japanese War. When, therefore, Bethmann strove for peace at the eleventh hour, he failed partly because Austria and Russia were so unyielding and partly because events marched so rapidly that he could not keep control over them. In this sense Germany had war forced upon her, not, of course, by England, as has been so commonly believed in Germany, but by her own ally and by Russia.

In a wider sense, however, these new documents do not in any way relieve Germany of the main responsibility. She is responsible for her negligence in giving Austria a free hand on July 5, and in not attempting earlier and more vigorously to reassert her control at Vienna. She is responsible—and here the responsibility rests especially on the Kaiser—in deliberately blocking several peace proposals which, though they might have turned to the disadvantage of Austria, and to the diminution of her own prestige, would have been as nothing in comparison with what was to take place. One

would be more inclined to listen to her assertion that she was fighting a war of self-defense if she had not sent so precipitately her ultimatums to Russia and France and insisted in adhering to her principle that mobilization inevitably must be followed by war. In a still wider sense, also, Germany is responsible, because one may say that militarism was one of the great causes of the war. It was militarism which was largely responsible for the campaign of lies and national hatred in the jingo press of all Continental Europe which had been poisoning public opinion for years. When the crisis arose, not a little of the direction which diplomacy took in Berlin, Vienna, and Petrograd was due to the pressure of so-called public opinion. It was militarism, too, which placed in power such men without scruple as Moltke and Tirpitz, or Sukhomlinov and Janushkevitch. It is always at a time of diplomatic crisis, precisely when it is most difficult for diplomats to keep their heads clear and their hands free, that the influence of militarism makes itself felt by hastening decisions for war, or even by getting the upper hand altogether. And for the growth of militarism in Europe, no country was so much responsible as Germany.

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